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## ITU Plenipotentiary Conference April 1989

Background. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), founded in Paris in 1865 and designated a UN specialized agency in 1947, is the world's oldest intergovernmental organization. From May 23-June 29, 1989, it will be holding a plenipotentiary conference in Nice, France, with ministerial-level delegates from most of the 166 ITU member countries. The ITU Plenipotentiary Conference meets every 5-7 years to set the course for the following decade. The last one was held in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1982. Between these conferences, the ITU Administrative Council, composed of 41 countries, acts as the Board of Directors for the organization.

The ITU is a unique forum for promoting interconnection of the world's telecommunications networks and for setting international telecommunications standards. In addition, the ITU has been a leader in advancing the rational, efficient use of the international radio spectrum, and it also maintains the central register of frequencies to avoid interference. More recently, it has supported technical cooperation and assistance in the developing world by providing consultants and advice on structure, maintenance, and management of telecommunications administrations. The accelerating pace of technological change and a growing trend toward regulatory liberalization over the last decade have created complex new challenges and opportunities for the ITU and its member countries, including the US.

US goals. At the conference, the US will seek to reinforce the ITU's capabilities to meet the challenges of the rapidly evolving international telecommunications landscape. The US strongly supports the central role played by the ITU and will work further to streamline and focus its operations. The US delegation, headed by C. Travis Marshall, senior vice president of Motorola, includes broad representation from the telecommunications industry and the major US Government agencies involved with international telecommunications matters.

Agenda. Administrative matters dominate the conference agenda. For instance, members will review the ITU basic instrument and the structure of the union, set the budget, and establish program policy guidelines in several areas. Probably the delegates also will face more controversial issues, such as proposals to expel Israel from the ITU and efforts to make the ITU itself a major communications development institution. In addition, election of senior officials is on the agenda.

- Expulsion of Israel. Several ITU members have proposed the expulsion or suspension of Israel from the ITU. The US strongly opposes such a measure, which would contravene the principle of universality as it applies to UN system organizations. It also

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would inappropriately inject political issues into the work of a specialized, technical agency. We wish to avoid a repetition of the 1982 Nairobi plenipotentiary conference where divisive debate over similar resolutions consumed two-thirds of the conference's 6-week schedule.

- Communications development. The US supports the technical cooperation and development work carried out by the ITU. We believe, however, that the effectiveness of these programs can be increased through prioritization and focus on definite goals, rather than through large ITU budget increases. The US also believes that the new ITU-affiliated Center for Telecommunications Development should be given time to develop a more distinct identity--one that will attract greater private sector contributions.

- ITU basic instrument review. An important agenda item centers on whether to divide the ITU's basic instrument into a constitution and convention with different majorities required for amendments. The US has participated in the preparatory work and will study carefully the final result.

- Structure review. Today's high rate of technological change and the increasing demands on the electromagnetic spectrum underscore the continuing importance of the ITU's standards-setting and frequency-management functions. The US will study any proposed changes in structure to ensure that the ITU builds on its traditionally strong performance in these areas.

- Budget. In addition to demands for increased communications development activities, proposals for enlarged language services and building expansion are creating upward pressures on the ITU budget. Generally during the last 7 years, the ITU has adhered closely to the goals of minimum budget growth, limitations on nondiscretionary cost increases, and clearer budgetary accounting. The US endorses these objectives.

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